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The Caliph Stork

A Burletta in Three Acts

CATHERINE deMILLE LEWIS

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THE CALIPH STORK

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THE CALIPH STORK

ACT I

SCENE: The city of Bagdad, on the banks of the Tigris. Garden of the Caliph's Palace, with ornamental cedar-trees of Lebanon, rows of fir-trees and palms of Syria; roses of Sharon in full bloom. A grotto and a fountain.

To the right a gate-way, which is guarded by two eunuchs, of enormous size, with shining black faces, and scimitars of bright Damascus steel. Beyond the gate-way are the muddy banks of the Tigris, where several storks are walking gravely.

In the rear is a portion of the Palace wall, broken by a window, square in shape and latticed, which opens on a balcony. A wide door below, carved in arabesques and vaulted. A single eunuch guards it.

SCENE 1

Caliph Chasid and Mansor, his vizier. The Wizard Kaschnur, disguised as a pedlar, with a pack on his back, approaches them through the gate-way toward the Tigris, which flies mysteriously open to admit him, while the eunuchs stand rigid, overcome by a deep sleep, their scimitars outstretched and motionless.

KASCHNUR

(*Approaches and addresses Caliph Chasid in a wheedling voice.*)

Most lordly Caliph,
I have a rare assortment of choice wares:
Daggers whose hilts are laid with pearls and traced in gold,
A drinking-cup which is a single onyx hollowed out:
And others, rare and costly, set with jewels, the ransom
Of royal slaves—with belts of Spanish leather,
As soft as silk, as finely grained and polished
And durable as steel. The chiefest of my treasures,
Most precious in its nature, is a mantle, —
Which is the secret kernel of men's thoughts,
The sunbeams of their life beneath the surface:
As slender as the marriage-ring, which signifies the union
Of two created souls as one in bliss forever:
So finely woven are its meshes that they make
The wearer of it seem invisible,—he knows the secrets
Of those apparent friends who are his bitter rivals;
So he distinguishes the substance of men's thoughts,
Beneath the surface gleaming of their life.

(*On a sign from the Caliph,* KASCHNUR *stoops,*

loosening the straps of his pack, which he places on the ground, displaying its rich contents.)

MANSOR

(*Stroking the texture of the mantle.*)
A marvel of the wizard's art, O Caliph, son of Ali!

CHASID

Now, by the Prophet's beard, display its hidden magic:
Or shall my eunuchs hew thee down, and thou shalt be dismembered,
For by the Judge and those adjudged, this is the fate of braggarts!

(KASCHNUR *envelopes himself in the mantle and becomes invisible. The eunuchs come to life, yawning and stretching their arms, and again stand motionless, but in natural and unstrained postures, near the gate-way to the Tigris.*)

MANSOR

He speaketh truth, my Lord, the Caliph.

CHASID

A wondrous cloak, indeed, and such a one as Princes
Had need of as a counsel to their interest.

(*He hesitates*)
—My court-physician, Avicenna,
Would scoff at it, and call it fable;
He hath the rules of logic comprehended,
And writ a lengthy treatise which describes
The properties of matter and the laws of force,
Residing in the atom, which to him
Usurps the province of the living soul.
He is a learned man, but hath not understanding
Of what the sages call the Unity of Nature,
The greater and the lesser God, the One in all created.

(KASCHNUR *removes the mantle and is again visible. He continues in a shrill, falsetto voice, with sing-song intonations.*)

KASCHNUR

Also to me the tongues of birds and fishes,
The one of which in water dwell, in air the other,
Are as familiar as our daily language,
Which is the outgrowth of our habit.
I can assume the outer shape
Of any bird, or fish, or beast,
And understand the hidden manner of its speech—

(*Bending over, he fumbles with a drawer, which forms a rear division of the pack. Loosening the drawer by a secret catch, he produces in his hand a tiny casket, which contains a vial of powder. A*

whitish cloud of vapor rises, with an acrid odor, as he removes the stopper.)

—The ashes of the brains of great magicians,
Which anciently enclosed in sacred urns,
The wise King Solomon had sealed and buried in the ocean.

This is that
Which is a secret means of transformation
To creatures of the sky above, or those who swim the sea,
Or those who are our fellows and who walk the earth with us.

CHASID

To be as happy as a bird, whose kingdom is the air,
To flee away and live again, away from ev'ry trial,
As free of heart as any stork, leaving the rest to God!
By transformation we'd become the little Gods of Nature.

(*There is a sudden flash, as of gunpowder. The scene clears, revealing* CHASID, *with the vial of powder in his hand.* MANSOR, *with a scroll, stands beside him. The pedlar and his pack have disappeared. They rub their eyes, as if awakening from a dream.*)

SCENE 2

MANSOR

(*Speaks quickly*)

Most mighty Caliph, my desire
Would be to exercise a kind of supervision
In your brief absence, and to check
The machinations of the Chauvinists,
Who otherwise would plunge the land in war!

CHASID

(*Perceives the scroll and snatches it from* MANSOR'S *hand.*)

A message as I live—it's Arabic, by Allah!

(*Reads the scroll aloud, hesitating perceptibly between the lines.*)

"To him who finds the magic scroll, and hath the wizard's powder,
(Bow thrice in thanks to Allah, as Mahoun the Prophet bids you:)
If you will take a snuff of it and cry aloud: 'Mutabor,'
You may assume the outer shape of any living creature.
—Again to human shape you are converted,
If you repeat the word 'Mutabor' thrice,

Facing the East and bowing thrice; this is the sole condition:
The spell is broken by a laugh, beware of human laughter,
For then the word's forgotten, and a beast you'll be forever."

(*He continues in a musing strain*)

—The commonplace annoys me, and the ills
To which the stupid flesh is heir. I'd like to find
The tenets of the world of thought mankind has left behind.
—The silly problems of my concubines!
Their stratagems and plots. Each fresh attempt
To gain the recognition of their rights. They have defiled
The classic fount of sacred Arabic
With problem-plays, sex-stories, and the like!

(*Addresses* MANSOR)

A single snuff of powder is the way to final freedom.
I'd like your company, my friend, en route to Nature's Eden.

MANSOR

(*Speaks fervidly*)

At my age to preserve a middle-aged appearance
Is what one thinks about, and not of strange adventures,

And one believes that one is happiest at home,
Avoiding false Elysiums of the mind.

(*Engaged in ardent controversy, the Caliph and his Vizier disappear along a side-path of the garden. The ladies of the harem enter through the postern-door and flutter toward the fountain in the centre, like brightly-coloured butterflies. They are waving suffrage banners, and wear shoulder-straps of yellow, with streamers of the same in bandeau-fashion on their heads.*)

Scene 3

Ayesha

(*Mimics the Caliph's gruff and hearty tones.*)
Where is the greybeard Mansor gone?
I saw him here a moment since.
He hath proposed to me to place the matter
Of women's rights before the city council.
I'll hold him to accounting, for the council now
is meeting.

Om Sauda

The eunuchs guard the entrance with drawn swords,
Outstretched and motionless, as if it were the garden
Of Paradise, and we the Prophet's houris!
—They guard the secret portals of the heart,
Against the blighting influence from without!

The dogma of the Holy Script is sadly antequated:
The human bias of the Prophet shows
The Prophet's limitations—

AYESHA

(*Vindictively*)

The earth has opened, and the Caliph
Has disappeared, as if by magic.
The single threat of proper action
Through legislative channels is too much for
Mansor!
Since they've deserted us, at least we can
Associate with other men.

(*Two storks appear above them, on the castle walls. With bills together, they appear to chatter gravely, then with a flash of their wings they fly away, beyond the castle and the garden.* AYESHA, OM SAUDA, *and the ladies of the harem, in many brightly-coloured groups begin to search among the shrubs, with many little cries of mock despair.*)

AYESHA

I've found the Caliph's slipper, look!

OM SAUDA

And I've the Caliph's girdle, this is odd!
I wonder if he's still alive!

(*They begin to search again, exploring every nook and corner of the garden.*)

Scene 4

(Avicenna *enters, in conversation with his friend the* Darwesh.)

Avicenna

To him who hath resources in himself,
Or findeth divers matters which arouse
The curiosity and counter-logic of the brain:
Can anything seem infinite, beyond the bounds of reason?
Can anything exist, except as human thought
Occasions it and gives it ground for being?
Speak not to me of riddles, and a space beyond
The three dimensions of our common sense.
For this is lunacy—beyond the *scope* of reason.

Darwesh

Your dogmatism leaves the major matter
Of human passion unexplained.

Avicenna

Again you offer as retort the obvious in nature:
The lunacy of human nature rests on postulates primeval.

DARWESH

Your catch-word is the "struggle for existence."
This,
And what you call "survival of the fittest!" These
to you
Explain the miracle of daily life.
Has man, who is a creature of the senses,
No higher attribute? Does man, thwarted,
Revert again to type? Is man condemned to
flounder
A lunatic in your delicious quagmire,
With hippopotami like you—

AVICENNA

(*Coldly*)

What you call passion—passion, we shall say,
Has for its end promotion of the species;
Thwarted, as you say,—this is reversion to the
savage,
And to the lowliness of brute creation.
This fact,—this fact, I say,—is proof of atoms
Existing, like for like, in beast and man.

(*He pursues his way alone, while the* DARWESH *stands apart in solitary meditation.*)

SCENE 5

(*The* CALIPH STORK *and his companion* MANSOR

descend slowly and alight beside the fountain, where they occupy themselves with poking in the mud, the better to preserve their alibi.)

CHASID

I must confess—I'd like a juicy cutlet.
Do frogs appeal to you,—or let us say—
An inch-worm?

(*He grasps a worm about the middle and examines it minutely, raising his bill high in the process, as the worm dangles from either side, and endeavoring to hold it firmly, as it squirms and wriggles to escape. He drops it on the ground and struts impatiently about, raising his wings and lowering them in turn.*)
The devil take these borrowed wings!
To be aesthetic,—yet to live:
The devil of a question—this!
Can you collect an item fit
To meet a borrowed bill?

MANSOR

(*Helps himself philosophically to a green pomegranate from a tree beside the fountain.*)
A bit of fruit, for fruit there is in plenty,
Your Majesty regrets this transmigration to a humble species!

CHASID

For my part, I'd prefer a fish,
An omelette, or perhaps a tender chicken,
Before I feast like you on fruits forbidden!
(*Sips water through his long and slender bill.*)
At least the fountain water's clean and sweet,
You'll have the colic, Mansor, if you eat that fruit!
—Snail à la mode—O happy thought,
The dish for any Caliph Stork.
Grand Vizier, you preserve the fiction well,
Your yellow legs, your long and slender bill!
I must confess—I've never seen the like.
For Art and Nature have conspired to make you true to life.

(*The Caliph and the Vizier eat snails.* AYESHA, OM SAUDA, *and the ladies of the harem, appear in full view beside a clump of fir-trees. They have the Caliph's slipper and his girdle, about which they are crowding with exclamations of astonishment and baffled wonder.*—AVICENNA, *in a huff, is standing near a palm-tree, with his back to the* DARWESH, *who surveys him with a look of absent-minded innocence.*)

CHASID

(*Nudges his companion with his wing*)
For Heaven's sake, don't laugh, or we are lost!

Behold the amiable Ayesha and Om Sauda,
With what perplexity they look about.
There's Avicenna strutting by himself,
He's quarreled with his friend the Darwesh.

THE DARWESH

(*Turns slowly with a yawn*)

Tell me, my sweet AYESHA, *where* is CALIPH CHASID?

AYESHA

(*With a smile*)

That's for the wise to say—I've found the Caliph's slipper.
It may know more than I about his disappearance:
O slipper,—where is Caliph Chasid?
Speak, slipper, and reveal the Caliph's secrets!
It is the *sole* mate of the Caliph Chasid.

THE DARWESH

Who knows, perhaps the Caliph's slipper could?

ZULEIKA

What naughty, naughty words, my dear Ayesha!

OM SAUDA

(*Severely*)

Ayesha, this is quite improper language;

I'd beg you to refrain from innuendoes,
Some dreadful accident, no doubt, detains the Caliph.

AYESHA

(*Coyly*)

O Darwesh,—you who know so much (and yet so little),
For you are wiser far than other men (and much more learned):
Would it be possible to trace the Caliph's footprint by his slipper?
For lacking it, he must have hopped away!
Or here's another sign,—the Caliph's girdle,
Do you suppose he's merely taking his siesta?
This girdle is an inconvenience to digestion.
Or, as we lack a single track, it's clear the Caliph flew!

(*The* DARWESH, *with a preoccupied and melancholy air, rises by a feat of levitation to the summit of the lofty wall about the garden.* AVICENNA, *who has turned squarely about, rubs his eyes, coughs violently and takes a pinch of snuff, in order to divert attention. The* CALIPH *by an effort refrains from open laughter at the spectacle of* AVICENNA'S *open-mouthed bewilderment.*)

THE DARWESH

(*Speaks commandingly*)

Rise, slipper, to the summit of this wall!

(*The slipper rises like a leaf, as if a gentle wind had borne it, and commences to zig-zag slowly toward the summit of the wall.*)

AVICENNA

(*Starts violently and rushes forward*)

It's Palladino's feat, and not his own!
I recognize it as a part
Of her apparel which he stole!

(*The* CALIPH *bursts into a fit of violent laughter, in which the Vizier discreetly joins. The ladies of the harem turn around, with eyes as large as saucers and regard the storks with keen suspicion.*)

AYESHA

(*Stamps her foot.*)

It sounded like the Caliph's laugh!
He's just deceiving us, I'm sure,
With one of his outrageous pranks.
We'll search the garden for him near those storks.

(*They run about in groups, searching among the shrubs, with little cries of indignation.*)

OM SAUDA

The creature's disposition is atrocious!

MANSOR

(*Addresses his royal master.*)

Your Royal Highness—I forget—the Word.

(*Turning toward the East he bows and scrapes, repeating in a raucous voice a single syllable.*)

Mu—mu—mu—mu—

AYESHA

Those stupid storks—Good Heavens, look!

CHASID

(*In consternation*)

I can't remember, either,—I forget!

(*He ruffles up his feathers with his bill, attempts to scratch himself with one foot, balancing upon the other, and likewise turns to face the East, with ludicrous contortions.*)

Mu—mu—mu—mu—

OM SAUDA

(*Pensively*)

What foolish storks—what odd gesticulation!
The creature's antics, I declare, are quite uneducated!

They should be trained to pose like early Grecians,
Or to the goose-step of the acolytes of Nietzsche!
One might expect, at least, an imitation of the Russian,
Barbaric poses in the nude—it is the highest culture!

(*She executes a step or two in awkward imitation of the ballet.* AYESHA *and the ladies of the harem pose gracefully behind her in exquisite mockery.* OM SAUDA *approaches the storks indignantly, attempting to shoo them off.* AYESHA *and the ladies of the harem follow, pelting* OM SAUDA *and the storks with pebbles, fruits and blossoms, pursuing them around the fountain. The* DARWESH, *descending from the wall, appears to meditate profoundly in the shade of an ailanthus tree. The storks endure in silence the ignominy of being chased and pelted; then, finally the* CALIPH *whispers breathlessly to* MANSOR.)

CHASID

If they should recognize us—do you—think—
They'd let themselves be ruled—by Storks?

MANSOR

(*Sadly*)

Eugenics—Sire—are—out-of-date—
You cannot win the people to your side—

By taking sides—too late.

(*Sadly they fly away.* MIRZA, *son of the Magician* KASCHNUR, *enters the garden through the postern-door, accompanied by the* CADI *and a body-guard of* JANISSARIES, *in complete suits of mediaeval armor. The Janissaries' hands are resting on the hilts of their swords; they look around with savage and malignant frowns.*)

SCENE 7

MIRZA

Where, ladies of the harem, is the Caliph?

AYESHA

We might enquire the cause of you, O smug and fickle Mirza!

MIRZA

(*Harshly*)

I am appointed by the city council,
To ascertain the reason for the Caliph Chasid's absence!
And failing explanations, to secure
The proper persons who connived to execute the Caliph!
May I enquire—a Palace revolution?
If so, then all of you are open to suspicion!

AYESHA

(*Pathetically*)

We have the Caliph's slipper,—nothing more.
There's nothing in it to convict a sparrow of complicity in this!

ZULEIKA

A little birdie whispered it; they saw his shadow in the sun.
The slipper is the pretext, not the answer to the crime!

AVICENNA

(*Lamely*)

The Eunuchs must be guilty of foul play:
O Mirza, look to them, before they hide away!

(*The Eunuchs turn fiercely, glaring dreadfully at* AVICENNA, *whose legs almost give way beneath him. He totters and is speechless.*)

MIRZA

This is a flimsy shadow of excuse,
By which you'd close the door on your true guilt.
Ho, Janissaries,—seize the persons of the guilty,
Ho, Janissaries,—we'll escort the prisoners of the Cadi
To trial before the council for the murder of the Caliph!

(*He consults in low tones with the Captain of the Janissaries.*)

It's understood, of course,—there'll be no legal action.

Put Avicenna in a sack and throw him in the river!

I'll answer for the ladies. Say that Avicenna

Attempted to escape and tried to shoot the Cadi!

(*He addresses the assemblage with an assumption of great dignity.*)

Know, all of ye,—I am the Caliph!

Appointed by the council to succeed the murdered Chasid.

(*Consternation prevails. The Captain of the Janissaries approaches* Avicenna *and whispers in his ear; the Janissaries form about the ladies of the harem, who shriek and laugh by turns in hysterical abandonment. The* Darwesh, *rolling his eyes, appears to vanish in thin air; there is a blare of trumpets and sounds of an approaching procession without the garden-wall.*)

Voices Cry

Hail, Mirza,—Lord of Bagdad!

Ayesha and Om Sauda

(*Standing apart in gloomy silence.*)

O Mirza, have respect for us; we are the Prophet's widows!

(MIRZA, *laughing sardonically, proceeds through the garden toward the postern-door, accompanied by the* CADI, AVICENNA, *and the Captain of Janissaries. They are followed by the ladies of the harem, who march abreast along the garden-path, leading in a broad line to the postern-door, guarded on either side by Janissaries, stationed like policemen during a parade of suffragists. The ladies wave their banners, and the eunuchs follow, bearing floats.*)

THE CADI

(*Pauses at the postern-door and kneels respectfully.*)
Hail, Mirza,—Lord of Bagdad!

(*On the battlements above two storks appear, standing in melancholy fashion on one leg, the other curled up underneath, their tail-feathers drooping disconsolately, their long necks outstretched to view the procession of the usurper* MIRZA. *The wizard* KASCHNUR, *disguised no longer as a pedlar, meets* MIRZA *at the threshold of the postern-door, and there prostrates himself, exclaiming*:)

KASCHNUR

My son, my son,—you are the Caliph!

(*The procession passes through the door. There are shouts and acclamations from beyond the garden walls.*)

VOICES

(*Swelling in crescendo.*)
Hail, Mirza,—Lord of Bagdad!

MANSOR

(*Speaks solemnly to* CHASID)
My Lord, the Chauvinists have won.

CHASID

(*Bitterly to* MANSOR.)
We have the truth at last, for Mirza, Lord of Bagdad,
Son of the Wizard Kaschnur, is my bitter rival:
It was his wish to ruin me that Mirza might be Caliph,
By changing me forever to the shape of some wild creature.
Let us do penance for our sins by pilgrimage to Mecca!

(*They fly away.*)

THE CURTAIN FALLS

ACT II

Scene 1

A narrow rear division of the Kaaba at Mecca. The ceiling and the walls are hung with heavy silk brocade, terminating in a band of gold above the centre of the hall, where stands the altar of Jehovah.

In the rear, above the level of the floor, is the oblong entrance, clearly marked against the light of day. A gold embroidered curtain is displayed above it on the wall.

The Caliph Stork completes a circuit of the hall and stands before the altar in an attitude of deep devotion. Mansor kneels and rubs his slender bill against the tiles, exclaiming in choked accents.

MANSOR

By Allah, how to rid one's self of this cursed shape!

(*He is imitated by the Caliph, who prostrates himself devoutly.*)

CHASID

(*In solemn tones.*)

By Mecca and Medina, by the Lord and by His Prophet,

Grant Thy servant absolution for his sins!

(*An attendant enters, horror in his eyes at the*

desecration of the sanctuary by the presence of the storks.)

ATTENDANT

(*Flourishing a feather duster.*)

Avaunt, avaunt,—obnoxious Storks,
And cease to trouble thus His Holiness the Prophet!
(*He pursues them about the sacred enclosure. Cleverly they evade him, by flapping out-of-reach above his head.*)

CHASID

Take it from me—I can no longer stand
The insults of my present state of being!
Humiliation, worms to eat, starvation,
And even at the Prophet's bier a miserable reception!

MANSOR

We were arrested in Medina, for our postures
Seemed unbecoming to the Saint's enclosure:
The Holy Mosque, which stands above the city,
And in the place selected by the camel.
With rings about our necks they led us to the Cadi,
Accused of blasphemous behaviour—
You, Chasid, son of Ali,—I—
A Mussulman without a blemish.

For why protest, when to the part you play,
The nether portion of you is a pair of yellow legs!

(*The attendant disappears, in search of assistance. The storks alight again before the altar.*)

The better part of valor is—to fly!

CHASID

Before the Prophet of the Lord I make my last appeal:
We have encircled the Kaaba and flown around it seven times;
—As is the wont of pilgrims. O, have mercy on us,
Restore to us the mem'ry of thy magic word, Mahomet!

(*He kneels devoutly on the tiles, then rising, bows and scrapes, facing the entrance in the rear, to the repetition of a single phrase:*)

Mu—mu—mu—mu—

(*He is assisted by the Vizier, whose attitude betrays profound pessimism.*)

MANSOR

Our quest is hopeless, for it is an age
Of Unbelief and Cynicism in High Places:
The Proselytes who tread the 'Seven Paths:'
Initiates in world-forgotten secrets:
Alone possess the answer to this mystery of being:

The only answer, Sire, is still to us forbidden.

(*Three times they fly about the central altar. Dejection in their mein, they alight in the rear, in the light of the narrow entrance; solemnly they raise their wings and fly away. The attendant enters, bearing a bird-net and a pole. The outer curtain falls.*)

Scene 2

A lonely spot within the great central desert of Tibet. The Seven Darweshes are seated in a circle on the ground; two of their number rise and begin to dance in an ecstacy of wild abandonment. The dancing grows wilder and wilder, in the wierd setting of table-land and barren hillock; a great light spreads suddenly across the place, of harmonious and mellow transparency, lighting up the faces of the seven devotees.

First Darwesh

It is the light of Asia on the world.

Second Darwesh

It comes to us in moments of idyllic bliss:
Reflecting thus the greater light within.

Third Darwesh

Here vanish all the kingdoms of the earth.

FOURTH DARWESH

And they who riot in abundance, they who lead
The life of king or peasant on the plains of life
below:
Delusion breeds in them desire. Desire
Reflects itself in varie-coloured hues,
The rich kaleidoscope of thought, which ever shifts
anew.

FIFTH DARWESH

This is the acme and the sum of that which seems
existent.

SIXTH DARWESH

It was the thought of Unity which wrought the
dream of Life:
When shall the mind of man awaken, when shall
he behold the Truth?

SEVENTH DARWESH

It cometh like a sunbeam in the night:
It stealeth like a thief on the awakened sight:
He shall behold it coming—and the dream of Life
Fall from him in the coming of the light.

(*There is a sudden hush of premonition. In the light, which is greatest at some distance in the desert, appears the black outline of a cross. It sways uncertainly in the vibrations of the light,*

then vanishes, and semi-darkness falls across the scene. The Seven Darweshes are prostrate on the sand, in attitudes of humility and devotion. There is a pause. Etched delicately on the dim horizon, as on the background of a screen, two storks appear, walking. They approach the Seven Darweshes in silence.)

CHASID

O masters of the secrets of the world!
Sublime and luminous beholders of the Truth!
I am a Caliph, doomed to wear this shape
Of monstrous degradation!

(*He ceases to speak, and a murmur like the sea arises from the Seven Darweshes.*)

FIRST DARWESH

It is the outer stigma of thy soul, O Caliph Chasid.

SECOND DARWESH

Thou shalt not free thyself, until thine imperfections
Are by thine eyes beheld as they appear to others.

THIRD DARWESH

This is the secret of the goal you sought.

FOURTH DARWESH

This is the only path to inner transformation.

FIFTH DARWESH

This is the peace of God, which passeth understanding.

SIXTH DARWESH

Your path is yonder, full of difficulty.

SEVENTH DARWESH

We can interpret only what is won, for knowledge comes of understanding!
And understanding is the fruit of ceaseless struggle with your selfhood.

(*The* SEVEN DARWESHES *have vanished. A tender, rosy light as of a distant sunset illuminates the sky and sands with transient, glowing color. The two storks linger, undecided.*)

SCENE 3

Utzim-Ochanti, Prince of China, enters with his seven followers. They are trudging wearily on foot, and their clothes are torn and ragged. The storks secrete themselves behind a rock, and listen to the conversation.

UTZIM-OCHANTI

O Wadi, I am overwhelmed with my humiliation,
When I behold in this the fruits of my wrong-doing.

To think that I have brought you to this pass,
Who am the Prince of China and the Heir of
Cathay.

BAKMAS

(*Severely*)

'Tis easy to repent of what is past,—the difficulty,
Sire,
Lies in amending it and starting life anew.
Accomplishments like ours seem barren of results
Under the circumstances of our fate.

LIAO PU-CHING

I, Sire, am, as you know, a swift accountant,
The son of Liao-Cheng, our foremost merchant.

AHMADI

And I am versed in languages, philosophy, and
logic,
No man can meet me in debate.

SEN PIH-CHING

And I a painter, who portrays
The world about us as it is.
I am the equal of the celebrated Mani.

SU TUNG-PO

To me the music of the seven spheres,

The dulcet harmonies of sound,
May be translated by the human speech,
Or through the instruments of music we possess.

KIN-CHAI

I am a runner, swift of foot,
A wrestler and an athlete; unexcelled
To bear a message swiftly.

CHEO KUNG-PU

And I the master of all trades:
A skilled mechanic and a builder, who creates
The cities of the earth, and those great ships
Which carry merchandise from port to port!
Beyond the lofty pillars of the deep.

UTZIM-OCHANTI

In such a wilderness as this our art is non-existent.
How to create—where there is nothing human!
Our gold were useless here, did we possess it,—
A single gem of price would be as worthless.
Marauding Tatar bands have stripped us of our riches:
And left us life alone, which is a hopeless burden:
It is the duty of a Prince to solve the difficulty.

(*He pauses in despair.* MANSOR *shows a sudden interest. He addresses* CHASID.)

MANSOR

The key to the enigma we possess:
The citadel of Zab is just across the steppe.
My Lord, let us reveal ourselves to them.
(*They step warily forth, to the utter astonishment of* UTZIM-OCHANTI *and his seven followers.*)

MANSOR

(*Obsequiously*)
Be not astonished—we are human beings,
Disguised against our will for a brief season:
We can assist you in your need.

UTZIM-OCHANTI

If men ye are, and under vile enchantment,
It may be in my pow'r to render you assistance:
If ye can help us to regain some human habitation.

CHASID

I am the Caliph Stork,—the Lord of Bagdad,
Outrageous as pretensions seem to such exalted station.
This is my Wazir Mansor—we were changed
By enmity to this unusual shape.

UTZIM-OCHANTI

Beyond the walls of Nanking is a cave,

Wherein a centaur dwelleth, blue in shade,
Who hath at times a wisdom more than man:
He may acquaint you, if he pleases, with the key
Of transformation to your nat'ral shape.

MANSOR

Your Royal Highness, we are but a league from Zab:
It lies across the hillock yonder; follow us.

(*The storks fly slowly toward the hillock, followed at a short distance by the Prince of China and his seven comrades.* BAKMAS *is bearing in his hand a carbuncle, which emits a flashing radiance as powerful as a search-light. The scene grows darker in the swift desert twilight, and gradually fades away, the glowing carbuncle appearing to the last, as the travellers reach the summit of the hill.*)

SCENE 4

The Royal Palace at Nanking. Hall of the Dragon, with a throne of ebony, surmounted by a griffin of wrought gold, with eyes of chrysolite and beryl.

The floor is tesselated and bears a regular design of geometric figures; windows along the sides of the hall are cased in mother-of-pearl. In the

centre is a chandelier of brilliants, supporting brackets which contain a thousand tapers.

On the walls are rich designs and painted friezes; the furniture is of teak-wood, inlaid with lacquer. There is a colonnade of marble pillars, forming a vista in the space beyond the throne. Statues of palladins in coats-of-mail stand near the entrance on the right, which flanked by marble pillars, opens abruptly on the street; there is a guard-room in the recess of the pillars.

Along the street a litter passes, guarded by slaves in royal trappings. There is a stir without and Kamsim enters, accompanied by eunuchs.

KAMSIM

(*Trembles, leaning in her agitation against a teak-wood stand.*)
—Who may the handsome stranger be?
The paleness of his skin, his worn attire
Proclaim that he has come afar:
From lands beyond the Mongol sway.
He hath an air of mystery which sets my heart aflutter.

(FANFUR *approaches through the colonnade, in conversation with his Vizier Fu-Chui.*)

FANFUR

My lady, you are pale—the ashes of late summer

Have dimmed the beauty of the lustrous rose.
You should refrain awhile from trips abroad,
—Your life is valuable to me, and to Cathay!

KIMSIM

My Lord, may I beseech you for my sake,
To entertain a stranger who is waiting in the street.
His noble and abstracted look bear witness to his birth:
He is a foreign prince, methinks,—a mandarin, at least.

FANFUR

We lack not hospitality, to rich and poor alike,
To men of high or low degree, who claim the sacred right:
Admit him to my presence.

(*A royal slave departs, in obedience to the command.* FANFUR *awaits the guest in silence. A fan-bearer enters through the colonnade and whispers in the royal ear.*)

FAN-BEARER

I would remind you, Sire, the delegation
From Tartary, with costly gifts, await your royal pleasure.

FANFUR

Receive them in the Hall of Foreign Elevation:
You, Wazir, may discourse with them—I would
behold the stranger.

(*The* FAN-BEARER *conducts the Wazir swiftly through the colonnade.* FANFUR *is waiting, with his eyes fastened on the marble pillars of the door.*)

A FEMALE SLAVE

(*Gossips in a low tone to another.*)

—Fanfur is always brooding of his loss:
He hopes, no doubt, that this may be his son,
Utzim-Ochanti,
Born of his first wife, Katif,—she far famed
For virtue and for beauty, who is now immortal.
She left him for the High Gods in the first year of
their marriage.
But lately he hath wedded, with the hope of heirs,
Fearing that Utzim hath departed to his death.

(GULGULI-CHAMAMI *enters, in the guise of a handsome young Prince. Her radiant beauty softens all who look upon her. She has a stately dignity of manner which hides her sex effectually.* KAMSIN *gazes at the stranger in a transport of emotion.*)

Scene 5

Gulguli-Chamami, or Sufur, as she chooses to be known, approaches the Emperor and inclines gracefully, waiting to be addressed.

Fanfur

Thou art, indeed, a Prince. (*He sighs.*) I see in thee a stranger.
What may thy lineage and country be, O royal kinsman?

Sufur

I am the Prince of Georgia, Sire: my father Kamas
Gave me the name of Sufur,—I was seized and borne away
To the most distant plains of savage Tartary,
By enemies of his,—the fierce Kazak,
The Chieftain of Soffala in that land.
But lately I escaped, assisted by my wits.

Fanfur

Well do I know the nature of those tribes,
With whom we ever war and who pay tribute now:
They are a race of lawless bandits, and their sway
Extends across the savage deserts of Tibet.
—I bid you welcome to the court of Cathay.
I had a son, (*he sighs*) whose fate to me unknown,

Recital of your woes might help me to endure:
The Lady Kamsim, Prince, at my express command,
Will be your hostess, while to other duties I attend.

SUFUR

This kindness is as warm to me, as is the breath
of friendship
To one to whom the world has seemed strange,
dark, and cold,
In that far northern country of my youthful exile:
For I am of the vales of Georgia, overlooked by
the grim peaks
Of Caucasus, which split the world in twain:
Beyond which is a race of most barbaric men.

(FANFUR, *accompanied by several slaves, proceeds to the rear of the hall and passes through the colonnade.* KAMSIM *no longer seeks to hide her pleasure at the sight of* SUFUR.)

KAMSIM

My Lord, the gloom of which you speak, may here
be dissipated:
This is the Kingdom of the Sun, and we the Sons
of Heaven,
For so the Kings of Cathay claim descent from
more than human.

SUFUR

(*Gallantly.*)

You are, indeed, as lovely as a goddess—
Whom Fanfur doth accept of Heav'n to raise to his high station:
Thus Fate ennobles some by birth, and others of their merits,
Such beauty, madame, has the pow'r to make a King your servant.

KAMSIM

O Prince of Georgia, could you know how I desired this meeting,
For I besought of Fanfur that he should receive you.
As of the northern lands you speak, so hath the heart of Kamsim
Been severed from the natural ties of friendship.
The doting Fanfur I despise—for can he know true passion?
He is forever moaning by the bier of the accurs'd Katif!
Daily he wets with tears a marble statue of her:
I never yet beheld such constancy in any mortal.
I am the sacrifice to him, for I must give Cathay a King.
It is a profanation of the rights of human nature.

(SUFUR *is silent, in amazement at the boldness of her language.* KAMSIM *interprets his silence favorably and continues as before.*)

Return not by the weary leagues—we are remote
from Georgia:
Consent to aid me, you shall be the Emperor of
Cathay.

(SUFUR *is overcome by indignation.*)

SUFUR

Perfidious Kamsim,—you would destroy your
benefactor!
The aged Fanfur who hath been your true protector.
Seek not, Madame, to win me to your part:
I am not to your purpose such an instrument as you
would like.

KAMSIM

I will destroy you, Sir, before you menace me!

(FANFUR *returns, and* KAMSIM, *running forward, throws herself about his neck, with shrieks and cries.*)

The Prince of Georgia, Sire,—he has attacked my
honor;
He took advantage of your absence and attempted
to betray me.

(*She weeps violently, with symptoms of hysteria.*

FANFUR, *with fury in his eyes, confronts the Prince of Georgia.*)

SCENE 6

FANFUR

Ho, Eunuchs! Seize the Prince!
(*The Eunuchs approach* SUFUR, *who draws his sword.*)

SUFUR

Your Highness, I protest my innocence.
I am not guilty of the *thought* of ravishment.
(FANFUR *is not appeased. He speaks coldly.*)

FANFUR

Lay down your weapon, Prince: reflect that your resistance
Would bring a hundred men to my assistance.
I shall adjudge the case—and give you chance of life,
For you shall have the right of manly combat:
In this way you may yet amend a grievous fault.

KAMSIM

(*In a voice choked with sobs.*)
He shall in single combat meet the centaur:
As he has injured me, so I award his sentence.

FANFUR

Sufur, you hear the verdict of Kamsim:
This centaur has his lair beyond Nankin:
He preys upon the people and has seized
A mighty tribute of their cattle and their sheep.
Many have sought to capture him and failed,
You may perform the mission and succeed, if you
are brave.

SUFUR

A verdict it may be, but not, my Lord, of guilt:
If human stratagems avail, I shall succeed in this;
I fear not, for the Gods give strength of heart to me!

(*She kneels in prayer.* KAMSIM *retires with* FANFUR. *The eunuchs drag her roughly to her feet. The curtain falls, as they approach the colonnade, with* SUFUR *walking quietly between them.*)

ACT III

Scene 1

A grove beyond the walls of Nanking. At some distance is an elevation, covered with loose rocks and giant boulders, among which is the cavern of the centaur. There is a cart-track winding through the grove and circling the eminence behind; to the right across the stage may be seen the pagoda-like towers which flank a gateway of the ancient capital, connected with the cart-road by a stone causeway.

Sufur is lying in a hollow, concealed among the trees; the sloping surface of the ground renders her invisible to the centaur, or to travellers on the sunken cart-road. Strewn about a portion of the road beyond the hiding-place of Sufur are carcases of cattle, rich cakes, and great open vats of sparkling wine. The sun is shining brightly on the scene.

The blue centaur appears among the giant boulders on the hill-top and sniffs the air, first curiously, then with signs of appetite. He trots cautiously about, as if in search of enemies, but does not discover Sufur, prostrate among the shadows of the trees below.

He descends swiftly, and with a whisk of his long blue tail along the cart-road. Approaching the wine, he smells of it, bending low above it, and

takes several mouthfuls. He feasts on cakes and portions of the carcases, sating his thirst with draughts of wine.

Overcome by his potations and the heat of the sun, he sinks into a deep sleep. Sufur, who has simulated sleep, raises herself gently on her elbow and slowly rises to her feet. Encouraged by the centaur's snores she approaches noiselessly, bearing heavy chains, with which she manacles his legs.

Arising, she waves her hand, and the great gate of Nanking opens, admitting to the scene several Chinese coolies, who drag a huge cage, mounted on wheels. Another coolie follows, leading a milk-white Tatar steed, who paws the ground impatiently.

The coolies lift the captive centaur and place him in the cage; he is sleeping under the effects of a potion. Sufur is about to mount the horse, when the Prince of China enters, with his seven followers. Above them on the hill the storks appear, and alighting stand motionless. At sight of the Prince of China Sufur betrays a degree of agitation and turns away.

The travellers by another route, to the right of the grove, have almost reached the gate, without observing the cage, the coolies and the captive centaur.

BAKMAS

Our journey's end approaches, O my Lord, Utzim-Ochanti:
The aged Fanfur, if he lives, will see his son with rapture.

UTZIM-OCHANTI

Since my departure, Bakmas, seven years have passed:
Toil and privation have accustomed me to life.
I am no longer, as I was, a rash, hot-headed youth,
I know the world as one who meets a stranger face-to-face.

AHMADI

And I, my Lord, have learned a lesson, hardly won:
For neither learning, nor blue blood could gain esteem at Zab.
They would have stoned me, for my wit
Made enemies, not friends.

UTZIM-OCHANTI

We owe to Bakmas this—his knowledge of the heart
Turned fear of me to love, and hate to cordial friendship:
For when the people turned on me and threatened to destroy me,

Because I honored not their King; the funeral-
cortege passing,
All kneeled before him in the dust, which I alone
neglecting
A Tatar smote me on the face; then by the grace
of Heaven,
The war-like spirit of my Sires was born in me
thrice over:
They cowered before me, and great numbers fell.
Bakmas, who stood beside me,
Proclaimed a judgment of the Lord and that the
Prophet sent me—
With eloquence and true discernment he disposed
of diplomatic questions.

BAKMAS

The victory, my Lord, Utzim-Ochanti—
Your powress did far more to gain, than those
brief words soon-spoken;
Before the waves of healing flow, the channel must
be opened:
Your royal anger, Sire, prepared a means of
irrigation.

(*They disappear beyond the gate, without observing* SUFUR.)

SCENE 2

The royal litter of Kamsim enters through the

Great Gate, followed by mandarins and ladies of the court of Nanking.

KAMSIM

We will behold the Prince's combat with the centaur.
I am enamoured to behold the centaur vanquished.

FADAK

(*A Lord*)

This centaur in its time hath slain a goodly portion
Of mandarins and knights—it is a fearsome creature.
I doubt the Prince of Georgia hath the skill to slay it:
He seems a slender stripling.

SAN SALAH

(*A lady*)

I cannot bear to see the noble Sufur trampled
Beneath the flashing hoofs of this most dreadful monster:
Who has a human head, joined to a horse's body.

(*The blue centaur, awakening from his sleep, bursts into a peal of laughter.* KAMSIM, *the mandarins and the ladies, stand agape in great amazement at the spectacle.* FANFUR, *with the dignitaries*

of his court, enters likewise through the gate, accompanied by eunuchs of the Palace guard.)

FANFUR

The captive centaur seems amused, but we are all amazed:
I pray you to explain to me the captive centaur's mirth.

FU-CHUI

(*Ignores His Majesty's command.*)

Imperial and Royal Highness, God forbid
That we should punish Sufur longer thus.
I will bestow on him the order of St. George,
It is a humble recompense for such a mighty deed.

FANFUR

Sufur, if you are wise as you are tried and valiant:
Explain to me, I pray, the captive centaur's laughter.

SUFUR

I would that I could speak for him, as he alone can do:
My Lord, the centaur may possess a knowledge of Chinese.

THE CENTAUR

(*In a deep, harsh voice.*)

If laugh I must,—the reason of my laughter
Is to behold the foolishness of mortals.
Kamsim betrays her Lord: she hath about her person,
Concealed among her slaves, two youthful gallants,
Daily in intercourse with them she robs her aged Master.
The Prince of Georgia she accused of menacing her honor
Is but a lovely princess, and the chosen of Utzim-Ochanti.

(*He ceases to speak.* KAMSIM *appears about to faint with horror;* FANFUR, *convinced of the truth, totters at mention of her faithlessness, but is overjoyed at hearing the name of his lost son.*)

FANFUR

Speak, Sufur,—by the name of my lost son—
I was assured by false reports of his untimely death.

SUFUR

(*Faintly*)

My Lord, the centaur speaks the truth—
Utzim-Ochanti rescued me from savage pirates,

Intending to espouse me; we were parted
Beyond the borders of Tibet, and I was here transported
By intervention of a jinn, who snatched me rudely from him.
He hath, however, in his hands a talisman to guide him:
A huge carbuncle which shall bring him safely hither—

(UTZIM-OCHANTI *and his seven comrades re-enter through the gate. The storks alight beside them and follow them across the causeway, under the protection of* BAKMAS.)

SCENE 3

FANFUR

I recognize my son—and he hath Bakmas with him.

(*All are silent, as* FANFUR *awaits his son, whom he embraces tenderly and who responds with deep emotion. At length* BAKMAS *speaks.*)

BAKMAS

Imperial and Royal Highness, when your son
Besought me to protect him on his journey:
I could not well refuse, nor could I then dissuade him
From what appeared to me a rash determination.

As tutor of his early years I understood his inclination,
And by my guidance I have shielded him from youthful follies.
I would be pardoned for my part in this transgression.

FANFUR

Bakmas, my greatest hope was in your courage:
You have restored to me the hope of Cathay.
Adventure doth befit the young and test a youthful fancy—
I doubt not that the Prince may rule the kingdom better for it.

(BAKMAS *in token of his gratitude kisses the hand of* FANFUR.)

UTZIM-OCHANTI

(*Gazes long and earnestly at* SUFUR, *as if to penetrate the disguise.*)
My father, who is this young Prince?

FANFUR

It is a princess known to us as Sufur, Prince of Georgia,
A most heroic maiden, who has captured the Blue Centaur.

UTZIM-OCHANTI

It is no other,—it is she,—
Princess of Tiflis, Sire, with your consent my Queen.
(*The lovers fall into each other's arms. The* CALIPH STORK *approaches with an air of dignity and regards the centaur with a look of interest.*)

CHASID

I have a riddle to propose—is this the centaur?

BAKMAS

My Lord, the Caliph Stork, who would regain his proper shape;
And his Grand Vizier Mansor—it may be that the centaur
Hath understanding of the art of transformation.

THE BLUE CENTAUR

(*Bursts into a peal of laughter.*)

Ah, Caliph Chasid,—seek the daughter of the King,
Who is immured like thee beneath the self-same spell;
Mayhap the castle you would find, if you should persevere:
Across the mountains to the South, beneath the suns of Ind.
(*There is a clap of thunder. The centaur and the cage vanish in a puff of smoke.*)

MANSOR

My Lord, the centaur is a powerful jinn:
If we would gain deliverance, we must cross the seas to Ind.

(*The curtain falls to the monotonous and heavy strokes of bell, gong, and drum, as the procession winds away,*—UTZIM-OCHANTI *mounted on the white steed, bearing in his arms Gulguli-Chamami, Princess of Tiflis. The two storks remain, as the Great Gate of Nanking closes with a massive clang, the keeper of the gate ascending to the watch-tower.*)

SCENE 4

A ruined castle in the north of Hindostan. A chamber open to the sky, with a huge gap in the rear partition, showing a banquet hall in far less ruinous condition.

The moon is shining through a large casement window, falling brightly on the mouldy walls and moss-grown flagging of the floor. Its rays penetrate the gap in the partition, revealing dimly the banquet hall beyond.

Two storks are standing in the moonlight, sound-asleep, their eyes closed, their heads thrown back, conveniently relaxing by standing on one leg.

There is silence, broken by the fluttering of bats.

Then a wierd note, rising and falling as in lamentation echoes through the chinks of the dilapidated wall. The storks stir abruptly, awakening from their sleep.

MANSOR

(*In a hushed voice.*)

Your Royal Highness, this must be a haunted castle!

(*The note is repeated, rising to a distant shriek, uncanny in the stillness.*)

CHASID

—It is a demonstration of the anguish
Of some uneasy presence, whom the Pow'rs of Darkness
Condemn to wander in these halls,—a spirit of the ages past,
And of the world departed.

(*With cautious steps they sidle to the casement window. Again the note resounds, this time much nearer, and in the gap of the adjoining wall appears a dark, fluttering shape. The storks recoil in apprehension.*)

MANSOR

(*In amused relief.*)

Your Royal Highness, as I live, it is a screech-owl.

(*They are silent, doubled up with mirth. The owl draws nearer.*)

THE SCREECH OWL

(*In a plaintive voice.*)

I am not what I seem—in this abandoned spot:
Where nightly in the solitude I wail and flap about.
I am the daughter of the King of Hindostan,
The Princess Lusa, whom the vile magician Kaschnur
Condemned to wear this horrid shape in which is nothing human.
For I refused to wed the wizard's only son—
(*She weeps in utter misery.*)

CHASID

(*Chivalrously.*)

I am the Caliph Stork, whom Kaschnur hath converted
To such a likeness as you see,—I was the Lord of Bagdad,—
Could I relieve you, Lady, it would be
A reparation doubly sought.
(*He bows, a yellow claw resting on his breast.*)

LUSA

I was informed by the wise fairy Gudhild,

Godmother at my birth, that grave misfortune
overhung me:
Which should be lightened by two storks—
It may be I can help you.

(*She wipes her eyes with the feathers of her wing.*)

CHASID

We lack the knowledge of a single word:
The recollection of it would restore our wonted
shapes.

LUSA

Kaschnur and others of his sort will banquet here
to-night:—
Could you conceal yourselves from view behind
the gaping wall,
The magic word he might reveal, as he is fond of
talk.
If so, should you again regain your natural human
shape,
But one condition likewise will restore me to
myself.

(*She conducts them to a wide chasm in the stone-work of the wall. They hide themselves, withdrawing out-of-sight, and* LUSA *hastily departs through the abandoned chamber, pausing to wave*

them an adieu with a large, feathery wing.)

Scene 5

The banquet hall beyond the opening in the wall is suddenly illuminated by the entrance of the wizards, bearing torches. They are clad in flowing robes, richly embroidered with emblems of the sun and moon; on their heads are velvet caps, cone-shaped and lofty; they wear long, pointed slippers.

They thrust the torches into caches on the wall, conversing in low tones and whispering like bats. Above the table a globe of light irradiates a mellow glow. The magicians seat themselves about the board, which now appears to be spread with viands, fruit and goblets of wine, as if for a repast.

The chamber to the front is cast in semi-darkness by the blaze of light beyond.

Mutajis

I saw the fairy Gudhild as I came:
And was obliged to make a wide detour.
The Prince of China rescued her and heaved aside
the stone,
With which we had enclosed her in the fountain—
She escaped,
And hath rewarded Bakmas, would the plague of
it were on him,

With that unique and precious stone,—the light of
Asia on the world—
Men call the Great Carbuncle—

KASCHNUR

The centaur which appeared to men to be a mon-
strous ill,
Such as they designate by War, by Pestilence and
Famine:
Was overcome by Sufur, whom the Prince of China
rescued:
It is, indeed, our fate to be undone by women.
For in their hands is pow'r—it seems the curse of
Satan
No longer rests, as we would have it, on the world:
The good old days of vengeance for the sins of
man are over.
Can it be true that Earth draws near to Heaven?

CASPAR

War chariots, and rain of fire above,
Which spit disaster from the clouds are harmless
weapons now:
I heard the rushing of a mighty wind,
The heav'ns were torn asunder, and the form of
Satan
Cast headlong to the earth below—he shall be

chained a thousand years.

(*There is a groan from the assembled wizards, the light flickers and grows dim,* KASCHNUR *rises and begins to speak.*)

KASCHNUR

And yet in one way still we triumph, for my son
Is Emperor of Bagdad, and his foes transformed
to storks.
They are condemned forever to the shape they wear
in penance,
For in their folly they forgot the magic word
"Mutabor."

(*There is a loud clap of thunder, which reverberates among the pillars and the passages of the ruined castle. The banquet hall is plunged in darkness; the wizards disappear. In a moment a new and rosier light appears in the most distant portion of the hall, visible through the breach in the wall. In its radiance the Seven Darweshes are standing, while a strain of holy music sounds wierdly through the silence and the darkness. The apparitions vanish; for a moment all is quiet.*)

SCENE 6

The storks appear in the moonlight of the deserted chamber; facing the East they bow thrice,

repeating the word "Mutabor," as they bow. Their long legs, enfolded in their mantles assume a human shape; their bills grow short and thick; their tail-feathers vanish; they become men. Chasid falls speechlessly about the neck of Mansor.

The screech-owl solemnly crosses the threshold of the chamber, staring with wide eyes at the transformation.

LUSA

Ye now are men—may I inform you of the one condition,
By which I may regain the happiness of living.

CHASID

Forgive me, Lady, in our joy at seeing our old selves again,
We had forgotten that you are our benefactress;
Accept a thousand thanks—we will reward you as we can.

LUSA

(*Simply*)

The one condition of my restoration
Is that the one of you should choose me for his wife—
Remember that I speak because I must—

And am not led to do so of myself—

(*They are silent. She flops across the floor, and disappears, tears rolling from her eyes at what she sees is manifest reluctance.*)

CHASID

(*Pauses politely as she goes.*)

—The Devil, Mansor—this appears to be
A delicate conundrum, for the lady
Is likely to be old and faded.
You would assume the lesser risk.

MANSOR

My Lord, I have at home a happy spouse,
Devoted to me now for forty years:
The sight of a young beauty would be like to break her heart.
Your rank, my Lord, alone is worthy of the Princess—
For I assume that she is young, and at the same time lovely.

(*There is an awkward silence.*)

CHASID

(*Ungraciously.*)

We might be heroes in the eyes of Bagdad,
Should we dethrone by our return the cruel usurper Mirza:

'Twere easy to restore again the people's independence,
For he has thrown the richest men in prison.
But almost any woman is a sure encumbrance:
You, Mansor, could divorce her after marriage.

MANSOR

My Lord, the privilege belongs to you:
The moment you behold her you may say three times the word, Divorce.

(*The screech-owl flutters in.* CHASID, *with a hint of recklessness, advances graciously to meet her, but speaks with forced politeness.*)

CHASID

Assume your shape again, O daughter of the King,
In recognition of your rank and of our gratitude.
I am the Caliph Chasid, and I offer you my hand.

(*In place of the screech-owl, a lovely Princess stands before them. She gives her hand to* CHASID, *who bends over it, speechless with astonishment, and covers it with kisses,* LUSA'S *eyes remaining fastened on the floor.*)

I offer you my heart and hand, O Princess Lusa.
You shall become my only wife and be the Queen of Bagdad.
And you shall be to me for life a noble aspiration,

To guide me safely on the path which is our life
together.
By beauty as by right of birth you claim my loving
homage;
Let us return and overthrow the Caliphate of Mirza!

(*The Fairy Gudhild appears, and waves her wand. There is a sudden transition to the throne-room of the Caliph's Palace at Bagdad. The inner curtain falls, rising quickly on the Epilogue.*)

EPILOGUE

Throne-room of the Caliph's Palace, with a marble portico adjoining and beyond it a view of the river Tigris. There are no attendants, and the landscape is deserted.

Several storks are drowsing peacefully on the banks of the river.

Three Frenchmen enter and survey the storks with mournful interest, as they appear in the offing, standing on one leg and in a melancholy fashion poking in the mud, from which they now and then extract a slug.

FIRST FRENCHMAN

(*Turns away with scorn.*)

Is *that* the Emperor? Messieurs, I assure you it
is not the Emperor.
I myself saw him at St. Helena in the custody of
Englishmen.
He was a small man, neat and careful in his
costume;
His mind was filled with heroic images;
He dreamed of France, though in exile.
He would not stand here, with his nose in the mud
of the Tigris, searching for earth-worms.

The dust and the dirt of the commonplace would not annoy him.

(*Enter three Englishmen.*)

FIRST ENGLISHMAN

(*Replying to the Frenchman.*)

You are wrong; the Emperor is not at St. Helena. He escaped, and not through the gates of disaster. The Emperor who hates us and our race escaped us even then.

(*Enter* MUSTAPHA *the Wizard, in lizard's scales, having the semblance of a coat-of-mail. Pointed Norman shoes are on his feet; a Grecian winged helmet displays his countenance in sinister and frightful fashion.*)

MUSTAPHA

Sirs, the *Emperor.* Disguised as a Stork, he has been doomed these hundred years to the lowly lot and melancholy turpitude of the Caliph Stork of Bagdad. In the sacred mud on the banks of the Tigris, he has mourned the death of Romanticism, and the festishes men have worshipped, shaped from the common clay of Realism. Sirs, the *Emperor.*

(*A sudden darkness falls. A splotch of light*

reveals the storks, still disconsolately poking their bills in the mud of the Tigris. Total darkness, and a sudden flash of light. The face of Bonaparte appears, as in the death-mask of Rouen, the face of Murat, and that of Josephine, lovely though pale.

The faces fade, and the curtain falls a moment, to rise immediately on the throne-room of the Caliph. The Caliph on his throne is receiving a distinguished delegation of Eastern potentates. They bow low before him in the Oriental fashion, with grave and dignified humility. The Caliph receives the potentates in turn, with courtly bow and smile, a little sweet and sad.)

An Attendant

(*Speaking to another.*)

Have you heard the story of the Caliph's exile?

The Other

Hush, it might be like the story of King Midas, which the barber told the reed, and the reed whispered to the wind, who blew it everywhere.

Attendant

Nevertheless it is true that the Caliph was no more than a Stork, and just one of those common Storks, which spend their time furtively and dread-

ing interruption on the banks of the Tigris. They must earn their living like that. They are lower in the social scale than you or I. Ask Mustapha, the Wizard. The Caliph and the Stork, the Caliph and the Stork—the Caliph Stork—

(*His voice rises in crescendo to the last words, becoming a discordant scream. The court scene begins to drift away. The other turns away, thrusting his fingers in his ears, and crying*:)

THE OTHER

I will not hear you; it is treason. Treason to the sacred person of His Majesty the Caliph Stork. He is of the lineage of Ali, adopted son of Mahomet the Prophet. Allah bismillah—Allah bismillah—I will not hear you!

(*He kneels on a corner of a prayer-rug. In the distance the muezzins are heard to chant the sacred hour of sunset. A subdued light. The scene fades gently.*)

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